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SEVENTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
New York, 13-22 January 1998

DRAFT REPORT

Note:
The draft report will be issiued in four sections:

Plenary meetings:	E/CONF.91/L.68
Meetings of Committee I:	E/CONF.91/L.68/Add.1
Meetings of Committee II:	E/CONF.91/L.68/Add.2
Meetings of Committee III:	E/CONF.91/L.68/Add.3

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B. Committee I: national programmes

National standardization (item 5)

Field collection of names (item 5 (a)

65. The report of Canada (E/CONF.91/L.38) highlighted the status of field collection of geographical names information and steps taken to develop a data base to track work conducted in this area. A map included in the report reflected information in the data base showing graphically those areas where systematic surveys, partial surveys, and independent data collection efforts are complete or underway. It was emphasized that respect of local usage was the paramount consideration in the standardization programme in Canada as a matter of policy, for which Canada was commended by several representatives in the conference. The high cost of systematic field collection was recognized as a difficulty to be overcome, and a contributing factor in the low number of researchers actively engaged in the field. The employment of telephone surveys was noted as an adjunct means of collecting data, but could not be considered a substitute for rigorous field collection. The pace of community-based field collection of toponymic data in northern Canada was expected to increase with the imminent emergence of Nunavut as a new administrative division.

Office treatment of names (item 5(b)

66. The report of Estonia (E/CONF,91/L.2) outlined the process undertaken to develop and realize the Estonian Law on Place Names of 1996. The Place Names Act of Norway, adopted in 1991, provided a useful model for the Estonian legislation. The Law on Place

Names was considered a requirement as the development of the Estonian juridical system following the re-establishment of independence led to certain lacunae in the legal code with respect to processes governing the official treatment of geographical names. The Law on Place Names contained three main provisions dealing with the procedures for the standardization of place names (including the specification of the national bodies possessing the authority to change place names), the requirements (or policies) to be imposed on the standardization process, and the application and use of place names. The law formalized the existence of the Place Names Board, established policies governing minority language names provided recommendatory guidance on the use of parallel names, and provided for the establishment and maintenance of a National Place Names Register.

67. The representative of Canada noted that the general principles reflected in United Nations conference resolutions should form the basis for the development of sound selection criteria for the choice of geographical names (E/CONF.91/L.35). A project could be envisaged whereby a codification of advantageous practices for name selection emerging from the several conferences could be catalogued.

68. The representative of Austria reported on the orthographic reform of the German language which was concluded among German-speaking nations in 1996 (E/CONF.91/L.62). Implementation of the reform would have certain implications for place names in Austria. The reform could be applied to the names of physiographic features,

but not to features where a legal act was required to effect a name change. The Conference noted that the reform had not been finalized in Austria, and that an expert group was engaged in reviewing its stipulations. The Austrian Court of Laws will consider the reform in the first half of 1998.

69. China submitted a report (E/CONF.91/INF.24) covering the mechanism for geographical names standardization, and elaborated upon the procedures for assigning and changing geographical names, the problems encountered in the standardization of geographical names terminology, and the criteria employed for the uniform spelling of Chinese and minority language geographical names. Special consideration was given by the Conference regarding the place names of Hong Kong, which had reverted to full Chinese sovereignty on 1 July 1997. The representative of China reported that the traditional characters and traditional names of features would continue to be used in this special administrative region.

70. The representative of the United States reported on the recently published booklet covering the principles, policies, and procedures for domestic geographical names standardization (E/CONF.91/INF.10). Revisions to the previous edition included the addition of a policy on Native American names, an extension from one year to five years following the decease of an individual, as a criterion in the commemorative naming policy, and an amendment to the policy for the use of diacritical marks. It was emphasized that predominant local usage played the most significant role in the determination of the application of diacritical marks. An

additional report from the United States (E/CONF.91/INF/13) provided further details on the requirements to be fulfilled in proposing a commemorative geographical name.

71. The conference recognized the progress made in toponymic data collection in the United States (E/CONF.91.INF/11). The twenty-five year place name compilation programme begun in 1976 was moving toward completion, with comprehensive data collection complete or underway in all but four States. The effort had been a collaborative one among various federal agencies and universities. The programme included provisions for the collection of variant and historical names. The principal sources employed had been mainly documentary, as prohibitive cost made field collection impossible.

72. The representative of Austria reported on the conversion of Austrian military mapping to conform to specifications promulgated by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (E/CONF.91/INF/19). The geographical names on the converted 1:50,000 scale maps would be identical to those used in civilian mapping, and those contained in GEONAM, the official Austrian place names register.

73. The report of the Russian Federation (E/CONF.91/CRP.21) described the main points of the federal law adopted in 1997 entitled "On Naming Geographical Features". The law was intended to establish the legal basis for naming and renaming geographical objects in the territory of the Russian Federation. It included, inter alia, provisions for the establishment of policies and procedures for the standardization of geographical names, for the establishment of a federal body to oversee the federal geographical

names programme, for the creation and maintenance of a National Catalogue of geographical names, and established the basis for international cooperation in toponymy. It was noted that much work remained to be done in elaborating the provisions of the new law, and the representative of the Russian Federation stated that the United Nations Group of Experts would be kept informed of future progress, as the practical aspects of the law are implemented.

Treatment of name in multilingual areas (item 5(c))

74. The representative of Finland reported on the choice of place name spellings to be used by translators and editors (E/CONF.91/L.16). Prior to 1997 the choice of place name spelling was not always entirely clear given that Finland is officially a bilingual country. The Finnish Constitution and official language act had provided the legal basis for languages in Finland. The Toponymic Guidelines contained descriptive information regarding the languages and dialects encountered in Finnish place names. In 1997 the Finnish and Swedish Language Boards issued recommendations on choice of place name spelling in cases where the legal provisions and the Topopnymic Guidelines were not sufficiently clear.

Administrative structure of national names authorities (item 5(d))

75. The representative of Canada presented two brief reports. The first (E/CONF.91/L.39) contained a digest of the strategic plan of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names. The complete plan, first developed in 1989 and updated several times

since, is being revised and will be made available in English and French versions. The second report (E/CONF.91/L.40) contained a useful index to articles related to geographical names standardization appearing in the issues of "Canoma," a periodical devoted to topics of Canadian toponymy, published by the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names.

76. The report of Australia (E/CONF.91/L.60) described the significant restructuring of the assignment of responsibility within the administrative hierarchy of Victoria, for the development, maintenance, and standardization of geographic information, including geographical names. Before 1995, the paradigm of centralized authority at the state level was in place. In that year, the state of Victoria undertook a complete review of the allocation of authority in the area of land information. Through devolution, centralized authority for all aspects of geographical names work would largely be passed to local municipal authorities. Less emphasis would be placed on coordination and centralization, with local municipalities playing a greater role in all aspects of land information. The duties of the newly established position of registrar of geographical names were explained.

77. The representative of the Republic of Korea described the organization and purview of the Central Committee of Geographical Names at the ministerial level, the provincial and special urban committees at the next lower level, and the committees at the city, district and county level (see E/CONF.91/CRP.7). Membership

requirements for the Central Committee were noted.

Toponymic guidelines for map and other editors (item 5 (e))

78. Finland presented its revised set of toponymic guidelines, now in its third edition (E/CONF.91/L.17). Among the changes from the second edition were the addition of notes on Sámi orthography, a revised list of generic terms, the addition of a list of abbreviations, changes to the administrative structure of Finland, and a reworked listing of municipalities.

79. Germany contributed the third edition of its toponymic guidelines (E/CONF.91/L.26), the update of which was necessitated by the administrative reform in the five new Länder. Additional details on the linguistic characteristics of place names in Germany were also included in the new edition.

80. The representative of Sweden presented the third revised version of the toponymic guidelines for that country (E/CONF.91/L.46). The guidelines followed the format recommended by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, with provision for description of linguistic features, names authorities, glossaries, and administrative structures. It was noted that the orthographies of North Sami and Lule Sami were not homogeneous, and that the orthographies were under the jurisdiction of the Sami groups themselves.

81. The Chairman of the Committee noted the three distinct spellings: Sami, Sámi, and Saami. Consultation with the Norden Saami Council was considered necessary to resolve this discrepancy.

82. The report of Estonia (E/CONF.91/INF.16) highlighted changes to the toponymic guidelines necessitated by the alteration of the legal apparatus governing place names in Estonia. The principal components of the guidelines were noted, including the description of Estonian as the national language, with accompanying characterizations of the minority languages and dialects (such as Võru) encountered in Estonia. The representative of Estonia remarked that the present second edition of toponymic guidelines was already partly out of date: the quantity of official maps published had increased and the list of villages and settlements now required revision. The Estonian toponymic guidelines had been made available on the Internet.

83. The representative of Austria reported that the toponymic guidelines for her country had been completely revised, with inclusion of all addenda and corrigenda (see E/CONF.91/INF.21). The guidelines would be published in the collected volumes of toponymic guidelines, and had not been made available to date on the Internet.

84. The representative of Norway introduced the revised toponymic guidelines for Norway. They were reworded to account for the provisions of the Place Name Law enacted in 1991 (see E/CONF.91/CRP.16). The role of Finnish and Sami as minority languages was described in the context of standardization based on orthographic rules and preponderant local usage. It was noted that most place names in Norwegian would have either a definite

or indefinite form, though occasionally even Norwegians find the distinction problematical. With respect to the Bokmål and Nynorsk forms of writing, the representative of Norway noted that in accordance with the Place Name Law, geographical names are standardized first by establishing the name's pronunciation, and then deriving a spelling based on the orthographic conventions conforming to the Nynorsk form of writing. A correction was noted to the table of the South Sami alphabet on page 6 of the report where Ø should be replaced with Ö.

85. The representative of the Czech Republic presented a report on the newly issued first edition of the toponymic guidelines for that country (see E/CONF.91/CRP17). The report represented the finalization of guidelines presented in provisional form to the 18th session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names in 1996. The content of the six sections of the guidelines were briefly described as were the general characteristics of the Czech language and its four principal dialects. With respect to the administrative structure of the country, it was reported that a new law adopted in 1997 would significantly alter the country's administrative make-up, with a consolidation of divisions into four first-order divisions (called *kraj*) to occur by the year 2000. The full form of the names of the current principal divisions was reported to be the generic term *okres* followed by the uninflected specific term. The alphabet table included two columns with information to facilitate the pronunciation of each Czech letter.

86. The representative of Italy described the revised Italian toponymic guidelines (E/CONF.91/CRP.20), the first revision since the guidelines were presented by Mr. Toniolo in the 1980's. The new version contained additional source material listings, a revised list of abbreviations, an update to the administrative division list to reflect the province (*provincia*) structure. The representative expressed appreciation for the efforts of Mr. Toniolo, who continued, in his retirement, to contribute to the toponymy of Italy.

87. Greece presented its revised toponymic guidelines (E/CONF.91/CRP.22), the product of a working group established in 1997 to review Greek toponymic policy and procedure. The guidelines superseded those issued at the 9th session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. The content and format of the new guidelines adhered to the recommendations of earlier United Nations conference resolutions. Special mention was made of the co-existence in contemporary Greek toponymy of place name spellings representing both the "dimotiki" and the "katharevousa" (i.e., simple and official administrative forms). Geographical names, in this environment, remain the same except for their endings and the accentuation system.

88. The Conference noted with satisfaction that nine countries had submitted up-to-date toponymic guidelines to the seventh Conference. The representative of South Africa, as coordinator of toponymic guidelines on behalf of the United Nations Group Of

Experts on Geographical Names, remarked that the toponymic guidelines were one of the most useful products to emerge from the Group of Experts and the standardization conferences. The Conference then considered the desirability (and feasibility) of the projected publication of assembled toponymic guidelines in combined volumes. The representative of South Africa expressed the concern that guidelines fall out of date for a variety of reasons, impelling a potentially costly programme of publication and republication. The use of the Internet as a medium for making accessible the toponymic guidelines was suggested as a less expensive approach. The representative of Algeria, among others, remarked that the Internet did indeed offer the promise of ease of accessibility, but this promise had yet to be fulfilled in many countries of the world. The conclusion reached by the Conference supported the issuance of toponymic guidelines in the various media available to the country involved, with the widest possible dissemination of the guidelines as the primary objective. The Executive Secretary introduced several remarks on behalf of the United Nations, offering the possibility of the publication of guidelines in the Newsletter of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, and in the *World Cartographic Bulletin*. A second important point raised by the Executive Secretary was the exploration of cooperative arrangements with the private sector to assist not only in the publication of guidelines, but in furthering other aims of the Group of Experts. The exploration of such arrangements could be

conducted by the Working Group on Publicity and Funding.

Exonyms: Categories and degree of use of exonyms

(Item 10 (a))

89. The representative of Israel presented a report on an unconventional approach to exonyms being studied in Israel (see E/CONF.91/L.10), which had also been mentioned in a paper presented at the 6th Conference in 1992. The report noted that at a certain level exonyms are ineradicable, and in areas where there are large influxes of tourists from foreign areas, it may be helpful, in support of the tourist infrastructure, to establish recommended exonymic spellings on a donor basis. Included in the report was a list of examples where donor English language exonyms had been established for use in tourist publications and on road signs. Some difficulties in this approach were noted by other representatives at the conference. The principal problem was that exonyms were usually understood as emanating from the linguistic and cultural tradition of a foreign people, leading to some skepticism that a donor principle could be applied. An additional difficulty was the problem of determining donor exonyms in the many languages that would be encountered in a tourist environment. Nonetheless, the prospect of mutual communication in the determination of exonyms on a bilateral level was an interesting one, and should be considered further. The representative of Israel emphasized that the crux of the report was the identification of a limited number of geographical features for which exonyms were deemed necessary,

and to separate these categorically from those features where only endonyms would be applied.

Exonyms: Principles in reducing the use of exonyms (item 10 (b))

90. No papers were presented for item 10 (b).

Exonyms: Provisional lists of exonyms (Item 10 (c))

91. The representative of Poland reported on the recently published *Polish Geographical Names of the World*, issued by the Commission on the Standardization of Geographical Names Outside Poland (see E/CONF.91/L.56). The entries have been arranged alphabetically, by country and by local administrative region. The Polish exonyms were given along with the equivalent local forms. The four constituent parts of the publication cover Europe (exclusive of Eastern Europe), Eastern Europe, the rest of the world's landmass, and oceans and seas.